

### **Pouring the yard**

We shovel sand and stones into the chunter,  
shake in cement. The gravel scratch  
of crushed aggregate scrapes  
in the mixer's churn; hosed-in water  
dampens the crackle of the mortar's  
lime reaction. The steel belly tilts  
to the turn of the dump wheel,  
remade earth slithers from its iron pout,  
slumps on the ground, buries  
hoof pock, boot print, rut of cartwheel.

The concrete's moist slurp greying our boots,  
our shovels shunt its mass across  
the sections, spread its clad to the party wall  
of the link shed; tamper planks  
race the hardening time, slap it flat,  
agitate in ridges, angle gullies for run-off.

The poured yard drying, hosed-on gallons  
slake its drouth, seep to the darkness beneath.  
Bunkered earth gulps its pallid leech;  
bugs, slaters, scuttle for cover, worms, grubs,  
squirm deep, root growth diverts for light.  
Concrete ripples stiffen across the screed,  
its load bearing ridges grip for tyres.

### **Painting the Fields**

1.

Store cattle gaze from the half door of dawn.  
The palsy quiver of winter grazing  
shivers in the hills; at the verges,  
limp whites of snowdrops hang their heads.  
The cuckoo hoot summons the plough.

In chugging fields, elbows lean on mudguards,  
driver's wheels of Zetor, Fordson, Nuffield,  
toe the furrow lines; coulter disc and sock  
follow the turning tyres and slice top soil,  
spark on granite interruptions.

A clay tide rising, the undercoat of earth slides up  
the steel glint of mouldboard and share,  
glistens into spring, nudges its fallow upside.  
Wilted stares of bent grass, marram,  
curl under its upturn, fall to face their maker.

2.

March frosts swell, relax in bared earth,  
break up clods, the turned-up sod  
prepares for its tilling. Harrow teeth rattle,  
skip, behind chunter of diesel engines.  
The loose pleats of furrows crumble.

Clover roughage of dungs flurry  
behind the whirr of powershafts,  
taupe splatters of pig slurry  
swirl round headrig, footing, mix their colours.  
The white mists of lime spreaders billow,  
dress the fertile earth, threshed seeds  
whish from spreaders, speckle its riddle.  
They snuggle below the towed weight,  
down-press of earth rollers. The silver grazing  
of the gone before decomposes in compost.

3.

The sun turns its dial, changes the settings,  
the broody soil wafts its balm.  
Rain and ray shower the lush easels of fields.  
Green blades of meadow grass sharpen, rise,  
and release the tail swish of the herds.  
The seedlings bud in the slow bake  
of ground heat, their roots push up shoots,  
vein sap to stems. Heads break the surface,  
watch the humble oven of earth ink in its picnic.

Bumble bees buzz over dyed quiffs of thistle,  
dip their nibs in blue wells of bellflower,  
nods of cowslip. Yellow iris of mayweed  
and oxeye gaze at fly pasts of Red Admirals  
and the salmon fascia of Painted Ladies.  
Wings flutter at fox-orange of hawkweed,  
violets, lilac, rose, pink hemp, honeysuckle.  
In hedgerows, blackberries  
purple up their punnets; crab apples  
blush their sweetspots, drop to the verges,  
bounce on bubbled roads. The risen heads  
of the sown sway on the ripe gilts  
of barley and rye, the golden lobes of corn.

### **Enough**

My sweaty belly button is full of seed hay:  
no more will I stook sheaves in threes,  
stand these hay teepees in their own reaped sward.  
I won't sned turnips, my soaked knees roped  
in the mealy jute of Sow and Weaner bags.  
My stooped days are gone. Your stubbled harvest  
can bristle; I won't bend to the sod,  
or gather Arran Banners, fill baskets, bag for trailers.  
No longer will I stand by turnip cutters,  
my bored arm numbed in its turnings,  
their sliced heads filling buckets for sows, store pigs.  
No more shall our cow slap her shitty tail  
across my cheek as I bend to the milking;  
keep your dirt, your gutter muck. No more  
shall I shovel dung through groop holes  
of byre walls, watch it steam on the caked pats.  
Farewell farm, stable, barn: this world can feed itself.

### The Auctioneer is Selling Our Cow

His gavel knock knocks, bidding arms lean on the guard rail,  
the handler hawthorns her round, and she's — *at three,*  
*at three, three ten, thank you sir, fifteen, thirty,*  
*at three thirty, now forty, who'll give me forty.*  
She's spent her head-down life behind hedges,  
ate round yellow petal of buttercup, white garland of oxeye,  
and — *at three thirty, ten, forty* — a hawthorn's poking  
the blonde whorl of her flank past the amped blah  
of — *three fifty, sixty, eighty, lovely Charolais, and at four,*  
*four ten, fifteen, thirty, forty* — the following eyes  
size up her hind, her side eyes know the hard grazing,  
green stain — *fifty* — of the mart screed's not the bent grass  
of Keenan's meadow, the ring's fluorescent glare's not  
the morning's haze over Croob, and as cap tip,  
brow scratch, index flick lifts it to — *four sixty, and ten,*  
*and ten, four eighty, on the market, five, and at five* —  
the dark histories of her eyes say all she's ever done  
is give her daily buckets of milk, suckled yearlings,  
and his practised stammer says — *fifteen, and forty, and five,*  
*forty five, five fifty* — and — *fifty five* — echoes over

the bullock roars, jump rails of outside lots and — *at five sixty,*  
*and five, at sixty five* — her tail lifts, at — *seventy, and ten,*  
her pats splatter the screed, steam on his — *five eighty,*  
*six, and ten, at six ten, now twenty* — and his hyped chant  
— *thirty, bid me ten, at six thirty, and five, and five, six forty,*  
*at six forty* — the hawthorn slaps the blonde sweat  
of her cheek, turns her round and — *at six fifty* — the dark misery  
of her eyes stare in the mart must, sees no oats, no drinkers,  
and — *at six fifty, ten, six sixty* — the muzzle-dark  
of her nostrils froth on her stopped cud and — *seven, at seven* —  
she needs to quench her drouth at Keenan's brook  
— *at seven ten, seven ten* — nuzzle her nose in barley oats,  
and their headshakes say no, slow his seven-ten prattle,

and — *at seven ten, seven ten, don't miss her, twenty,*  
*and selling, at twenty, seven twenty* — bidding arms fold  
on the guard rail — *at seven twenty, last call, last call* —  
the black histories of eyes see no feeding trough  
by the steel fencing, welds, of the holding pen — *and at*  
*seven twenty, last call, and selling* — her handler hawthorns  
her round, the gold rivers of her urine run the ribbed incline  
of the exit ramp, and at the — *and Sold* — his gavel knocks her down.

### **Sheep Carcass**

Picked rib hoops, bone knuckle juts  
at rump, hock, flank; the seized forelegs  
stiff as whinroot: a landed sparrowhawk  
flaps on the scapula, gold irises hold me  
in its field. I keep my distance, watch  
the claws knead, beakhook jerk at gaunt elastic  
of sinew, cartilage. A chawn ear tag at my feet.

The skull's wedge is stripped of its wimple,  
her once blackface gone. The jaw's clench  
has the look of a grin. On the fetlock,  
a winged fist of blowflies. Below, I spot  
the crusted, swollen cloven that held her back.

The midges hum a halo, blue-green shimmers  
of blowflies buzz over the night's raw feast.  
Nothing wasted of her bloat, this abandoned hill  
now holds high her bones: her gone udder  
that will never suckle, that no birth lamb will nuzzle.

This leaving sparrowhawk flap-flap glides  
across the fenceline, where wool of the gone flock  
twists on the barbs. I follow the flight path:  
blunt tail, wingspan, undulating to its high soar.  
I think of built nests, gaping beaks, fledging life.